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ABSTRACT

Educators in Ontario, Canada, have been subjected to a barrage of changes in the last decade. Many of these changes have had direct or indirect financial implications for teachers. These changes can be organized as "curriculum" and "school governance." In an effort to understand the effect of educational change on teacher stress, this paper presents findings of a study that examined the ways in which southwestern Ontario secondary school teachers perceived changes in the Ontario education system. Interviews were conducted with 45 teachers in 7 southwestern Ontario public and separate school boards. Thirteen of 45 respondents believed that the main objective of significant educational change was to save money. A majority said that the most significant change involved a policy or practice that affected the nature of student experiences. The second and third most significant changes affected both teaching practices and student experiences. Most viewed the changes as being initiated by the government and the community. Less experienced teachers saw the purpose of change as improving education; more experienced teachers believed the purpose of change to be for social improvements. Five tables are included. (LMI)

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IMPLICATIONS OF FINANCIAL CHANGES IN EDUCATION ON TEACHER STRESS: A STUDY OF TEACHER PERCEPTIONS

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IMPLICATIONS OF FINANCIAL CHANGES IN EDUCATION ON TEACHER STRESS: A STUDY OF TEACHER PERCEPTIONS

Purpose

- To determine how a sample of Southwestern Ontario secondary school teachers perceived changes that had financial implications impacted on their teaching.
- To extend understanding of change on teacher stress and add to data for the Consortium for Cross Cultural research in Education (CCRIE).

Rationale

- Educators in Ontario have been subjected to a barrage of changes in last decade. Many of these changes have had direct or indirect financial implications for teachers. These changes can be organized under curriculum and school governance.
- Teacher perceptions toward change and implications of these perceptions on the quality of their work lives should provide useful data to inform policy-makers and to help them create more favourable work environments for teachers and more favourable learning environments for students.

Changes in the Ontario Education System

- New common curriculum for Grades 1-9.
- Transition years program for Grades 7-9.
- Proposed school board amalgamations.
- Mandated parent advisory councils.
- Imposition of a Social Contract and attendant salary rollbacks or freezes.
- Restructuring of government services and moves toward greater pay for services.

The CCRIE survey sought answers to the following questions from the perceptions of the respondents::

1) Which educational change most affected the school and students?

2) What was the origin and the objective of the change?

3) At what rate did the change take place?

4) What was the teacher's role in the change?

5) What were the forces that helped and hindered the change effort?

6) How did the change affect the teacher's work life, relationship with others, and professional development?

7) How did the change affect the students' schooling experiences and learning?

8) How do teachers feel the identified change will affect their willingness to participate in future educational change endeavours?

Sample

- 7 Southwestern Ontario Public and Separate School Boards
- Convenience sample of 9 comprehensive secondary high schools located in urban and suburban areas
- 45 teachers with at least 3 or more years experience
- 28 males and 17 females comprised the interviewees
- Ages ranged from 27 to 56 with the average being 42.8 years
- Experience ranged from 3 to 33 years with the average being 17.7 years

Operationalization of Instrument

- participants were interviewed by the research team and each interview lasted anywhere from 25 minutes to 60 minutes
- each interview consisted of 12 in-depth questions

METHOD

Instruments

- Information was gathered using a structured, in-depth interview. The instrument was developed by the Consortium for Cross-Cultural Research in Education. The consortium consists of researchers in Australia, Canada, England, Hungary, Israel, Netherlands, and the United States. The consortium developed a set of interview questions as one instrument to investigate teacher perceptions of change on their work lives. The interviews were completed directly with teachers and took from about one half hour to one hour to complete. All interviews were conducted in the teachers' schools, during school hours. Responses were recorded by the interviewer using a standard question and response sheet. These responses were then coded using a standard coding manual constructs that had been developed by the consortium. The change identified by the interviewee as the most important was used as a focal point for the remaining questions in the interview. Changes over the past five years were rank ordered. Questions were asked to determine who initiated changes. Objectives of the changes were also pursued. The rate of change was also categorized to ascertain whether implementation of change was gradual or immediate.

- **Findings**

Of the 45 teachers who completed the structured interview 21 identified a financial implication to the most significant change to which they referred. Sixteen of the respondents felt that increased accountability was the objective.

Teachers surveyed listed these changes as stressors in their work lives:

Cutbacks in funding.
Lack of new technology in their classrooms.
More computers needed.
Greater accountability needed.
Full funding for separate high schools.
Construction of schools and employment facilities.
New building to incorporate new technologies.
Social contract and associated financial setbacks.
Funding cuts and their disadvantage to junior teachers.
Class size increases.
Budget cuts for programs and materials within the schools.
Changes in family structure and concomitant educational problems.
Bi-leveling of grades.

Introduction of computer technology without adequate training for teachers.
Evolution of family, latch key kids, lack of impact of teachers - breakdown of traditional family.

Ministry changes without adequate consultation.
Government changes in educational methods.

Origin

18 of 45 respondents indicated that problems associated with change 1 had a financial cause.

24 of 45 respondents indicated that change 2 had a financial cause.

21 of 45 respondents indicated that change 3 had a financial cause.

Main objective

13 of 45 indicated that the main objective of the changes they identified was to save money.

Findings

CCRIE developed codes to categorize teacher responses identified by teachers as most significant in the folowing manner:

CHANGE	Teacher Experience 3-5 yrs (n = 3)	Teacher Experience 6-15 yrs (n = 14)	Teacher Experience 16-24 yrs (n = 18)	Teacher Experience 0ver 25 yrs (n = 10)
Policy or practice regarding student assessment in education			5.6%	
Policy or practice of subject matter				
Policy or practice of teaching method		7.1%		10%
Policy or practice of subject matter and teaching method			5.6%	10%
Policy or practice of organization or structure for educational delivery		7.1%		
Policy or practice regarding financial allocation				
Policy or practice affecting kind of experiences of students	66.7%	64.3%	72.2%	40%
Policy or practices of administrative management of school or system		7.1%		
Policy or practice affecting relationships with parents/community groups			5.6%	
Teachers' character and experiences novel		7.1%		
Students character and experiences novel	33.3%	7.1%	5.6%	40%

Findings using collapsed categories for identification of 2nd most significant change:

CHANGE	Teacher Experience 3-5 years (n = 4)	Teacher Experience 6-15 years (n = 14)	Teacher Experience 16-24 years (n = 18)	Tacher Experience 25 yars + (n = 10)
School system management		7.1%		20%
Teaching	66.7%	50%	55.6%	20%
Learning Outcomes		7.1%		
Student Experiences	33.3%	35.7%	44.4%	60%

Findings using collapsed categories for identification of 3rd most significant change:

CHANGE	Teacher Experience 3-5 years (n = 4)	Teacher Experience 6-15 years (n = 14)	Teacher Experience 16-24 years (n = 18)	Tacher Experience 25 yars + (n = 10)
School system management		7.1%	11.1%	20%
Teaching	66.7%	42.9%	38.9%	30%
Learning Outcomes			11.1%	
Student Experiences	33.3%	50.0%	38.9%	50%

Origin of change using collapsed categories:

ORIGIN	Teacher Experience 3-5 years (n = 4)	Teacher Experience 6-15 years (n = 14)	Teacher Experience 16-24 years (n = 18)	Tacher Experience 25 yars + (n = 10)
Teacher Initiated				10%
School Initiated		14.3%	11.1%	30%
Community Initiated	33.3%	28.6%	27.8%	
Government Initiated	66.7%	57.1%	61.1%	60%

Purpose of change using collapsed categories:

PURPOSE	Teacher Experience 3-5 years (n = 4)	Teacher Experience 6-15 years (n = 14)	Teacher Experience 16-24 years (n = 18)	Tacher Experience 25 yars + (n = 10)
To improve education	66.7%	35.5%	27.8%	30%
Accountability/Efficiency		21.4%	27.8%	
Social Improvements	33.3%	42.9%	44.4%	70%